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¶11. (C) Summary. The level of violence has risen in Mogadishu and the provinces since the Ethiopian/TFG action against the Ayr sub-clan and Courts' radicals in late April 2007. Attacks tend to be more focused than earlier in the year. While this violence could be laid at the feet of Islamic extremists, there are plenty of others in Somalia with motive, means, and opportunity to rain havoc on the TFG and its Ethiopian allies. Somali piracy is on the upswing with three ships currently in ransom negotiations. End summary.

Mogadishu

¶12. (U) Since Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Prime Minister Gedi declared victory over the Hawiye/Haber Gedir sub-clan on April 26, Mogadishu's new mayor, Mohamed Omar Habeb (Mohamed Dhere), and new Somalia police chief, Abdi Hassan Awale (Qeybhid), have announced several measures aimed at improving security in the capital or reclaiming it for the TFG:

--Tinted windows on civilian vehicles are banned, effective May 7. Press reports indicate that residents of the city were "rushing" to remove tinting.

--Illegal firearms are banned. According to the press, 151 Mogadishu businesses located at the Bakaara market agreed to turn in weapons used for defending their premises. The business owners, however, demanded that the TFG protect the market; and the TFG agreed. Since the surrender of weapons, Bakaara businesses have been robbed and looted by armed men in TFG military and police uniforms; and the business owners are demanding their weapons back if the TFG/Ethiopians cannot protect them. Mayor Dhere told a news conference that Islamists were taking refuge in the market and staging attacks from it, a charge hotly denied by the market's head businessman. Police chief Qeybhid, according to a press report, warned Mogadishu residents that their homes would be confiscated "if weapons like mortars and rockets are found in or under" them. Local contacts and Somali press report that TFG and Ethiopian security forces have carried out search and seizure operations in several Mogadishu neighborhoods, confiscating arms and other munitions from various "markets". According to one press report, "106 land mines, 460 F-1 bombs and 48 RPGs" were found under a Koranic school. Contacts and the press also report that Ethiopian and Ugandan (AMISOM) troops have been responding to citizen requests to defuse unexploded ordinance located throughout the city.

--Unlicensed street vendor kiosks are banned. TFG forces have torn down kiosks along the streets and in Bakaara market, but Mayor Dhere has told them they could relocate to the Ba'adlaha business market in Xamar Weyne district.

--Face veils on women were banned. On May 8, TFG forces in Mogadishu began to forcibly remove women's face veils and burn them on the grounds that men from anti-government elements could hide behind the veils when perpetrating terrorist attacks.

According to press reports, community uproar forced Mayor Dhere to disavow the veil seizures and order that they be stopped. The Council of Somali Religious Scholars condemned the TFG saying "the veil is among the symbols of Islam" and the TFG's action "expresses the hatred against the Islamic Shari'ah".

--District commissioners are appointed and held responsible for security incidents in their areas, along with residents of the area where the incident took place. On May 6, Mayor Dhere appointed eight district commissioners (Shibis, Kaaraan, Xamar Weyne, Boondheere, Huriwaa, Shangaani, Cabdi Casiis, and Yaaqshiid).

--Police/soldiers are posted on all roads entering the city. Five hundred former police officers completed retraining for reinstatement under Somali instructors on May 17 at the Lafole police training center. They are preparing for deployment to Mogadishu.

--People residing in government buildings are not allowed to return to their homes or, if still occupying such buildings, would have to vacate.

¶13. (U) Various Islamists websites continue to tout a change of tactics by anti-government elements from direct confrontation with the TFG/Ethiopians such as the late March and early April battles in Mogadishu to Iraq-style bomb and assassination attacks. In a May 3 posting on Islamist "IslamToday.net", a "Letter from the Islamic Courts to the United Nations" attributed to former Courts Chairman Hasan Dahir Aweys states:

Quote

Resolving the Somali problem lies in the following steps:

[A.] Refraining from sending the UN or African Union forces set to be deployed to Somalia, because although they are meant to replace the Ethiopian forces, the Somali people will fight them and will not welcome them...

[B.] Expelling the Ethiopian forces from Somalia because they are enemies, not friends. They are the killers of our people, colonizers of our lands...

[C.] Having all those concerned with all aspects of the Somali issue and from all groups and factions meet in a neutral and safe place, implement what they agree on, and provide them with international support, without dictating conditions which do not serve their interests. Afterwards, it would be time for constructing the country and resolving contentious issues between Somalia and its neighboring countries through good mediation.

End quote

¶14. (U) Since May 2, significant security-related incidents in Mogadishu include:

May 2

A Somali website reported that an unknown, armed group using small arms attacked Ethiopian and Somali troops in the Bakaara area, killing one Somali and wounding one Ethiopian. The motive is unknown; but, according to the report, residents in the area had been complaining that Ethiopian troops were quartered in their homes and would not leave.

May 4

An explosion of unknown origin around 2200 hours local between KM-

4 and the Hotel Ambassador, on a road often used by TFG officials, wounded one individual and left a crater in the road. We do not know the cause of the explosion but cannot rule out a deliberate attack by unknown perpetrators.

May 5

An explosion killed three children who were playing with unexploded ordinance near their homes, according to press reporting. Seven others were wounded. The incident appears to have been an accident.

May 7

Ugandan soldiers from AMISOM captured alive a Somali male with a bomb strapped to his body moments before he could detonate himself inside Mogadishu port, according to press reports.

An explosion near the presidential palace, Villa Somalia, destroyed a police vehicle and injured seven policemen, according to press reports. The perpetrators are unknown; but, police chief Qeybdid blamed Islamic Courts remnants, according to the press.

May 8

Somali press reported two nighttime explosions at an intersection near Bakaara market. There were no injuries. Perpetrators and motive are unknown.

May 9

A bomb (possibly a hand grenade) killed one civilian and injured up to a dozen others at Bakarra market's pharmaceutical and foreign exchange section, according to press reporting. One report indicates that TFG security personnel were demolishing illegal "drug kiosks" in the market at the time of the explosion and that the "grenade" was probably aimed at them--but missed. The perpetrators are unknown, and we do not know if they were motivated by the demolition.

May 10

Up to three civilians were killed by an explosion (possibly a landmine) near the Ambassador hotel at approximately 2020 hours local. Press reports indicate that a TFG convoy had passed just before the explosion, and a number of government officials reside at the hotel. The perpetrators and motive are unknown.

May 11

TFG and Ethiopian forces captured four former supporters of the Islamic Courts in Bakaara market. After questioning, the four were released.

May 12

An explosion (possibly a remotely controlled device) killed four and wounded several others near the KM-4 junction in the vicinity of the international airport, according to press reports. At least two of the dead were TFG security personnel passing in a government vehicle. The perpetrators and motive are unknown, although a pro-Islamic Courts website, "Aayaha.com" implies that the attack was associated with the attempt of anti-government elements to bring down the TFG and drive the Ethiopians from Somalia.

May 13

Two unknown men armed with pistols assassinated Huriwaa District Commissioner Abdulahi Sheikhowo outside his home near Bakaara market, according to press reports. Mayor Dhere had appointed Sheikhowo to the post the previous week. The perpetrators and motive are unknown.

May 14

Three men dressed in TFG security uniforms entered two businesses in Bakaara market on the pretext of searching for illegal weapons

and robbed them of large amounts of cash, according to press reports. While the perpetrators are unknown, the motive appears to be robbery.

Gunmen in TFG security uniforms attempted to enter adjacent World Health Organization and UNICEF officers but were driven off by security guards after a brief firefight. One guard and two bystanders were reportedly wounded. While the perpetrators are unknown, the motive appears to be robbery.

May 16

An explosion (possibly a remotely detonated device) killed four AMISOM Ugandan soldiers and wounded several others as their convoy moved through northern Mogadishu, according to press reports. One child playing near the scene was also killed. The TFG blamed Al Qaida for the attack, and an Islamist website claimed that Al Shabaab acknowledged responsibility for the incident. (Comment. Al Shabaab is suspected of having an affiliation with Al Qaida. End comment.) According to the independent Somali website, Markacadeey, elders of the Hawiye Leadership Council, which negotiated the truce with Ethiopian forces in April and which has met with the TFG leadership, condemned the attack on the Ugandans. The attack occurred during TFG President Yusuf's visit to Uganda.

May 17

TFG security forces exchanged small arms fire with men dressed in TFG uniforms who were trying to rob a qhat (mild narcotic widely chewed in Somalia) market in the Xamar Weyne district, according to press reporting. There were no injuries, and two of the three gunmen were reportedly captured. The motive appears to be robbery.

May 18

Unknown assassins attempted to kill TFG Prime Minister Gedi with an explosive device as his motorcade was en route to the international airport (reftel A). There were no injuries. A suspect was captured, but the motive is unknown.

A gunman killed Somali army Colonel Ahmad Siyad near Hared Mosque in Hawlwadaag District in the early morning hours, according to press reporting. The perpetrator and the motive are unknown.

May 20

Unknown assassins attempted to kill Mayor Dhere with an explosive device. Bodyguards killed a suspect who had been in a tree near the incident site, and a civilian was killed by stray bullets. The perpetrators and motive are unknown, although Dhere blamed Al Qaida-affiliated individuals, according to press reports. An explosion occurred in the Yaaqshiid area in front of the Mahmud Ahmad Ali Secondary School where TFG and Ethiopian troops are based, according to a press report. One individual was killed. Reports differ as to whether the "bomb" was thrown from a passing vehicle or whether it had been left in a plastic bag in front of the school. The perpetrators and motive are unknown.

An explosion (probably a landmine) occurred on a road in the vicinity of Arafat Hospital in the Yaaqshiid area as a TFG convoy was passing. Two civilian bystanders were reportedly wounded. The perpetrators and motive are unknown.

May 21

A "roadside bomb" (probably a landmine) aimed at an Ethiopian convoy exploded around 0730 local in Mogadishu's Dayniile district. No Ethiopians were reported injured, but a press report indicates that two civilians were wounded by shrapnel. The Ethiopians killed one suspect who was "resisting arrest", according to the press; and they arrested up to four other suspects. Motive is unknown.

May 22

Four TFG soldiers were wounded in an explosion in the livestock market (Suuqa Xoolaha) area of Mogadishu, according to press

reports. One report claims a fifth soldier was killed and two civilians were wounded. The perpetrators and motive are unknown.

Kismaayo

¶15. (U) The intra-Darod clan squabble which began April 23 over government appointments in Kismaayo continues. The ousted Majerteen (President Yusuf's sub-clan) officials and militia remain outside the city threatening to return by force. Marehan (ousted Defense Minister Bare Aden Shire's sub-clan) officials and militia remain in the city, proclaiming their loyalty to President Yusuf's TFG. De facto town officials imposed a 9:00 p.m. curfew beginning May 7. A TFG delegation led by Interior Minister Mohamud Guled failed to resolve the situation, and clan elders are now taking their turn at mediation.

¶16. (U) According to press reports, on the night of May 2, a man attempted to plant a landmine along the route Minister Guled would take to the Kismaayo airport next morning. The mine exploded during planting, killing the perpetrator. Four other suspects were arrested on May 4. The motive for the probable assassination attempt remains unclear, although Prime Minister Gedi and other TFG officials stated a week later that Islamists from the former Islamic Courts are regrouping in the city.

Elsewhere

¶17. (U) Gunmen captured two CARE contractors (a Britain and a Kenyan) on May 9 in Puntland region and held them in Hariibi, about 120 Km southeast of Bossaso. They were released unharmed on May 15. According to press reports and knowledgeable contacts, possible reasons for the abduction include: --revenge for the recent Ethiopian fighting in Mogadishu; --a Darod sub-clan feud intended to embarrass the Puntland government; --a simple \$100,000 ransom demand; and --using the victims as bargaining chips to force the Puntland government to release three, seized, Finnish fishing boats.

8a. (U) According to press reports, up to 20 people were killed in clashes between rival Hawiye/Abgal sub-clan (Warsangeli and Agonyare) militia in the Haji Ali area of Adale District in Middle Shabeelle Region about 150 KM north of Jowhar. The clashes, which began May 11 and continued through mid-month, arose from a dispute over farmlands and burned houses.

8b. (U) In a related incident, gunmen from one of the two militias ambushed a convoy of TFG officials and reporters traveling to Haji Ali to mediate between the sub-clans. Eleven individuals, including two radio journalists, were killed and four were wounded.

¶19. (SBU) According to a UN report, an armed group--later identified as TFG soldiers--attacked an ICRC food convoy on May 11 in Buloburti district of Hiran region. One contractor was killed. According to UN and press reports, several NGOs have withdrawn their international staff from central Somalia over security concerns.

¶10. (SBU) Three adults and two children were killed and 15 others were injured on May 15 in a blast at a cinema in Baardheere in Gedo region. The cause of the explosion is unknown, but there is press speculation that an unknown individual tossed a hand grenade into the audience and escaped. If it was an explosive device, the motive is unknown. A UN report, however, speculates that "extremist Muslim forces" tossed the grenade because of their opposition to cinemas. Earlier that day ousted Defense Minister Bare Aden Shire had returned after his dismissal from the TFG to his residence in the town.

¶11. (U) One individual was killed and three were injured in fighting between sub-clan militia on May 17 in Bur Gabo, south of Kismaayo. The clash erupted over disagreements on how to share town revenues. Sub-clan elders were mediating to resolve the issue.

Piracy

¶12. (U) On May 3, Pirates hijacked the MV "Miriam Queen" en route from Dubai to Mogadishu with general cargo for Somali businessmen, according to press reports. The vessel was last reported anchored off Hobyo, about 400 KM north of Mogadishu; and ransom negotiations were in progress. The status of the crew is unknown. Mogadishu Mayor Dhere accused "certain businessmen in Mogadishu" of backing the pirates, according to a press report.

¶13. (U) Three pirates "armed with machine guns and a rocket launcher" attempted to hijack the Qatar-flagged MV "Ibn Younus" 290 KM off the Somali coast on May 14, according to press and shipping reports. The ship escaped with its crew unharmed after an hour chase during which pirate RPGs damaged the crew's quarters.

¶14. (U) Two Tanzanian-registered South Korean fishing boats were hijacked by pirates on May 15 about 390 KM off Mogadishu en route to Yemen from Mombassa, according to press reports. The boats, the MV "Mavuno I" and "Mavuno II", carried 24 sailors combined: four South Koreans, ten Chinese, three Vietnamese, four Indonesians, and three Indians. All are reported safe and well. The ships were last seen anchored off Hobyo but may have been moved. The South Korean navy reportedly dispatched an officer to Bahrain to assist winning the release of the ships and their crews. Negotiations are reportedly on-going.

¶15. (U) Pirates attempted to hijack the MV "Victoria", under charter to the World Food Program (WFP), on May 19 as it left the Somali port of Merka after discharging its food cargo. The vessel escaped when two armed boats were dispatched from the port to engage the pirates. One of the rescuers reportedly was killed in the firefight. The "Victoria" returned to Merka to await instructions from its owner.

¶16. (U) WFP reportedly is concerned that this apparent upsurge in piracy will adversely affect its food distribution program among the 325 thousand needy it feeds per month in Somalia. A WFPcharted food ship in Mombassa reportedly is hesitant to depart for Somalia due to the risk of piracy.

¶17. (C) Comment. Though violence has reasserted itself in Mogadishu, it is more targeted now with assassins and landmines/IEDs than it was in February and early March with mortars and RPGs. Internal clan squabbling and clashes--as well as piracy--are an eons-old tradition in Somalia. In the existing, unstable security environment, it can be difficult to discern which incidents/events are manifestations of long-standing disputes triggered by current clan or individual grievances against the TFG/Ethiopians, and which are the work of Islamic extremists and/or terrorists. The explosion in Bakaara market on May 9, for instance, could be the work of Islamists hiding in the market as posited by Mayor Dhere; or it could just as plausibly be the action of one or more businessmen unhappy with the TFG's campaign to tear down their stalls and destroy their livelihoods. The same could be said of the attacks on Gedi and Dhere. Absent evidence more damning than the fact of an explosion itself, there could be alternative culprits to the radical Islamists. Munitions remain readily available to anyone with money, and motive abounds in this devastated land. End comment.

Ranneberger